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SUBJECT: EXTENSIVE FLOODING, EIGHT DEAD

Ref: Sofia 943

¶1. SUMMARY: After months of drought and record high temperatures (reftel), heavy rains and flooding have now hit northeast Bulgaria, killing at least eight people and damaging houses and infrastructure. A state of emergency has been declared in the municipality of Tsar Kaloyan, the worst-hit area, as well as in some other regions. Central government agencies are coordinating efforts with local authorities to provide emergency assistance to the most affected areas. The GOB is concentrating on lowering the risk for infection now that weather conditions have started to improve and waters are receding. End summary.

#### Drought, Heat, and Now Floods

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¶2. Torrential rain following weeks of heat, drought and wildfires caused severe flooding in northern Bulgaria August 4-8. The town of Tsar Kaloyan, 160 miles northeast of Sofia, was worst hit. An

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artificial lake burst its banks, killing at least seven people, including a mother and her young child, the Bulgarian Civil Protection Agency reported. A priest found drowned in a village nearby the Danube town of Ruse (northern Bulgaria) where the river Russenski Lom overflowed, was the eighth fatality. According to media reports, 200 houses in Tsar Kaloyan were severely damaged, with 100 of those being destroyed. The Ministry of State Policy for Disasters and Accidents (MSPDA) estimates it will take a month to accurately determine the full damages. Severe flooding as a result of heavy rainfalls was also reported in Montana (northwest Bulgaria), the ski resort of Bansko (southwest Bulgaria) and Pazardzhik (central Bulgaria), where another state of emergency was declared.

#### Drowned Animals Threaten Disease

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¶3. The government is still removing and incinerating the bodies of an estimated 800 farm animals that drowned in and around Tsar Kaloyan. As late as a week after the flooding animal remains still lay on the streets, creating a risk of spreading disease. The National Veterinary Service warned local inhabitants to refrain from consuming meat from drowned animals. To limit the spread of contamination, authorities continue to disinfect private homes and yards where dead animals are still being found in Tsar Kaloyan.

#### Government Declares Emergency

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¶4. On August 7 the central government declared Tsar Kaloyan a disaster area. As a result, the army, police, and civil protection units are providing security and equipment for the clean-up. The MSPDA has 14 crews, assisted by another four from the Ministry of Defense, working to reestablish safe water supplies. The Council of

Ministers approved emergency funding for construction materials for rebuilding affected homes and is waiting for municipalities to apply for such funding. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Bulgarian Red Cross have provided humanitarian aid - food, water, and clothing. The Social Ministry also provided USD 10,500 worth of emergency rations to Tsar Kaloyan, along with 275 leva (USD 190) to each family which lost someone in the floods. In Ivanovo municipality, Ruse region, another USD 1,700 of hygienic and food packages were distributed. (Note: The Mission had earlier declared an emergency and, with Department concurrence, is in the process of distributing USD 50,000 for forest fighting assistance. Despite the flood damage, the GOB declined to seek additional USG assistance.)

15. While the direct impact of the fires and flooding is concentrated in the affected districts, ripple effects -- in higher prices -- are also being felt. The full impact on the agricultural economy and consumer prices is still months off.

#### Licenses for Three Artificial Lakes Revoked

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16. Most of the death and destruction in Tsar Kaloyan was caused when several nearby artificial lakes burst their banks. Although the Ministry of Environment and Waters found that the heavy rain was responsible for the flooding, the leaseholders of the three artificial lakes near Tsar Kaloyan will be fined and deprived of their licenses for failing to report the risk of water overflow and flooding as a result of the heavy rain.

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